United Nations S/PV.7652

Security Council

Seventy-first year

Provisional

7652nd meeting
Friday, 18 March 2016, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Gaspar Martins	(Angola)
Members:	China	Mr. Shen Bo
	Egypt	Mr. Aboulatta
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Japan	Mr. Okamura
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. Taula
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
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	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Uruguay	Mr. Rosselli
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Ramírez Carreño

Agenda

The situation in Burundi

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16-07624 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Burundi

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Burundi and the United Republic of Tanzania to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome His Excellency Mr. Alain Aimé Nyamitwe, Minister for External Relations and International Cooperation of Burundi.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Mr. Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and Mr. Jürg Lauber, Permanent Representative of Switzerland and Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I warmly welcome the Secretary-General to the Security Council and I now give him the floor.

The Secretary-General: I am pleased to have this opportunity to brief the Security Council on my visit to Burundi late last month, which came on the heels of the Council's own travel to the country. After a devastating civil war that claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, the signing of the Arusha Agreement in August 2000 put Burundi on the path towards peace and reconciliation. The effort that ended the civil war hinged on the willingness of former battlefield adversaries to sit at the same table and become partners in Burundi's common future. During my recent visit to the country, I urged all Burundian stakeholders to remember that lesson from their past and show genuine commitment to an inclusive political dialogue as the only means to peacefully resolve the crisis.

In order to promote confidence-building, the Government announced, prior to my visit, the annulment of the arrest warrants against 15 opposition figures. The Government also decided to reopen two media outlets that had previously been banned. Following my meeting with him in Bujumbura, President Nkurunziza agreed to release up to 2,000 detainees. We now look forward to the full implementation of those measures and expect further steps in the same direction, including the release of all political prisoners and an end to restrictions on civil society and media organizations. At my invitation, key political actors from the Government, the ruling party and opposition parties sat together with me to discuss the future of the country. Nothing prevents Burundian political actors from continuing on that essential course.

Burundi's political leaders must summon the necessary courage and confidence to launch a credible political process and build a future where the people of Burundi can once again live in peace and enjoy their fundamental rights. As I reiterated to President Nkurunziza, the international community stands ready to support Burundi in advancing a credible and inclusive dialogue process. The East African Community, the African Union and the United Nations must work together to provide the dedicated and professional mediation support that Burundi needs and deserves during this challenging time. The appointment of former President of Tanzania Benjamin Mkapa as East African Community facilitator is an encouraging development.

During my visit, I underlined my deep concern about the volatile situation in the country. I expressed my profound worry at the potential for the violence spiralling outward, ending in civil war. I urged the Government to take measures to address the continued violence and the impunity that fuels it. The Government sought to assure me that the situation was gradually stabilizing. However, in my meetings with civil-society organizations and opposition parties, I was presented with a very different picture. I heard deeply disturbing allegations of continuing violence and human rights violations, including acts targeting women and children. Clearly, that is an unacceptable situation, one that requires the utmost attention to ensure that those responsible are held accountable for their acts. The High Commissioner for Human Rights will provide a more detailed briefing on the human rights situation.

I cannot stress enough the profound humanitarian consequences that political unrest, violence and impunity carry for the population. Recent humanitarian assessments suggest that harvests in crisis-affected areas have fallen short, and that nearly 700,000 people now suffer from severe food insecurity in Burundi. Since the beginning of the crisis, more than a quarter of a million people have fled Burundi and sought

refuge in neighbouring countries, which have shown commendable hospitality and solidarity. Despite the assurances provided by Burundian officials that refugees are eager to return and that some have already started doing so, the current number of refugees is indicative of the distress felt by Burundians over the continuation of violence and intimidation in their country. During my meeting, President Nkurunziza asked for United Nations assistance in securing the safe and unhindered return of the refugees.

Pursuant to resolution 2248 (2015), my Special Adviser, Mr. Jamal Benomar, has deployed a team to Burundi. I would like to thank the Burundian authorities for the cooperation and access extended to my Special Adviser and his team. I also welcome the letter of President Nkurunziza to the Security Council of 24 January, expressing the willingness of the Government to work closer with my Special Adviser and his team on issues of dialogue, security, disarmament, human rights and development. This is a complex set of issues and challenges, one on which we stand ready to fully support Burundi and for which we will require adequate capacities. The United Nations will continue to work with the Government to ensure that more concrete steps are taken to improve the human rights situation and that all stakeholders are willing to engage in a genuine and inclusive dialogue in good faith.

There is no alternative to a political settlement of the Burundian crisis. The international community must shift its approach from a focus on crisis response to a culture of early action and prevention. That can be achieved only if regional and international actors jointly focus their energy, attention and resources, and work together without delay to support a nationally owned inclusive political process in Burundi.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Al Hussein.

Mr. Al Hussein: I thank those present for this opportunity to discuss my continuing and grave concerns regarding the human rights situation in Burundi.

Despite some positive signals by the Government in recent weeks following visits by a delegation from the Council, by the Secretary-General and by five African Heads of State and Government, as well as two visits by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Mr. Ivan Šimonović, and the most recent visit of independent experts at the request of the Human Rights Council, those signals have yet to be followed up with strong and consequential action aimed at engaging real reconciliation.

After a court hearing of their case, 47 detainees who had been arrested almost a year ago were been provisionally freed this week. Those 47 were on the list of 125 detainees suggested by my Office for immediate release. We see that as an indication that some effort is being made to re-establish the rule of law. I strongly urge the release of all of the others on the list, especially political prisoners. As just mentioned by the Secretary-General, the Government has further pledged to release approximately 2,000 prisoners.

The Government has also taken steps to ensure that one fully independent radio station can operate. A second radio station, which has also reopened, is not independent from the Government. That gesture is encouraging, but falls well short of full freedom of expression and information. The Government cooperated with the team of independent experts mandated by the Human Rights Council during its first visit to Burundi earlier this month. The experts met with military, police and intelligence officials, in addition to victims and several representatives of civil society. The secretariat of the independent expert team is due to arrive in April for a four-month deployment, but the Government's approval is still pending. It is crucial that the investigative team be permitted to operate.

Despite indications of limited progress in some areas, serious human rights violations continue. My Office, which has presences in Bujumbura, Gitega, Makamba and Ngozi, has detected no indication of any decline in reports of arbitrary arrests and detention. Indeed, 140 such cases have been recorded this month so far, most of which were arbitrary. Moreover, although the numbers are clearly imprecise, we have seen increased reports of torture and ill-treatment since the beginning of January. During a recent visit by my staff to some detention centres in Bujumbura, it appeared that almost half of the detainees had been tortured or ill-treated — some of them seriously.

Despite the recent initial steps towards allowing the operation of a few independent media outlets, critical or independent voices remain severely restricted. Political opponents continue to be subjected to intimidation and arrest. Six days ago, 16 leading members of the

opposition party, the Forces nationales de libération, were arrested in Kirundo province by police assisted by Imbonerakure militia members associated with the ruling party. On 9 March, Hugo Haramategeko, one of the few national opposition figures remaining in the country, also was arrested. Civil society continues to operate within an extremely limited space, with activists suffering judicial harassment, arrests and torture, as well as violence and intimidation by agents of the State or militia associated with the Government. Since the violent events of December — involving an armed attack against three military camps around Bujumba, followed by reports of particularly brutal crackdowns by security forces in a number of neighbourhoods — two separate armed groups opposed to the Government have emerged. Two members of the ruling party, the Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie-Forces pour la défense de la démocratie, were killed by gunmen on Monday.

Grenade attacks are an almost daily occurrence, with grenades being thrown at police or military targets or indiscriminately tossed into crowds of people. Last month, Médecins sans Frontières treated more than 115 people who had been wounded by grenades over the course of just four days. I am very deeply concerned by the lack of progress in investigating the multiple serious human rights violations that have been reported over the past year. I take note of the recently released report of the commission of inquiry set up by the Ministry of Justice and led by the Prosecutor-General to investigate allegations of extrajudicial killings during the events of 11 December 2015. However, I urge further and much more credible investigations into the alleged multiple mass graves in the country, the torture, sexual violence and killings that were reported in December and many other serious allegations.

Continued human rights violations and impunity for perpetrators mean that many of Burundi's people live in terror. The country remains on the brink of a sudden escalation of violence of even more massive proportions. We have already seen hundreds of people killed, thousands detained and over a quarter of a million Burundians fleeing to neighbouring countries. The crisis has devastated Burundi's economy, compounding the human rights violations suffered by the people, and UNICEF reports that the number of children admitted for severe acute malnutrition in Bujumbura has doubled between October and December 2015. The crisis has also created a major humanitarian emergency and contributes to destabilizing the Great Lakes region, with major implications for regional peace and security.

I note that the European Union (EU), which is Burundi's largest aid donor, announced earlier this week that it would no longer issue funds through or to the Government. That action was taken in line with article 96 of the EU-African, Caribbean and Pacific trade agreement, which calls for the suspension of development cooperation when essential elements, such as respect for human rights and the rule of law, are violated.

The Council has clearly recognized the urgency of the situation in Burundi. I encourage it to continue to work to persuade the Government to take significant steps towards real reconciliation and inclusive national dialogue. Half-measures will not heal the wounds that Burundi's people have suffered. There must be an end to disappearances, arbitrary arrests, extrajudicial killings and torture, and there must be clear and public moves to hold perpetrators to account, including agents of the State and members of armed groups associated with the ruling party. Such steps are vital to restoring public confidence and to placing Burundi on the path towards development, security, and respect for human rights.

The President: I thank Mr. Al Hussein for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lauber.

Mr. Lauber: I am grateful to have this opportunity to brief the Security Council today on my recent visit to Burundi, Rwanda and Ethiopia and on the latest discussions within the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). I am also pleased that His Excellency Mr. Alain Aimé Nyamitwe, Burundi's Minister for External Relations and International Cooperation, is participating in today's debate, and I would like to use this opportunity to express my gratitude to him for the cooperation that the PBC enjoys with the Government of Burundi in its peacebuilding engagement. The following remarks were discussed and agreed on by the member countries of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission, including the country concerned, Burundi.

From 15 to 20 February, I undertook my second regional visit as Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission. I held consultations in Bujumbura, Kigali and Addis Ababa. The main objective of my visit was to pursue the policy dialogue

with the Government of Burundi and other national and international stakeholders in order to complement ongoing peacebuilding efforts by the United Nations, the African Union and the East African Community (EAC). In Bujumbura I met with the President of the Republic, His Excellency Mr. Pierre Nkurunziza, and members of his Government, representatives of political parties, religious leaders, representatives of the opposition, the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, the National Commission for the Inter-Burundian Dialogue, civil-society organizations, international and regional financial institutions, human rights and military observers of the African Union (AU) and representatives of the international community and the United Nations family.

From Bujumbura I travelled to Kigali, where I focused on the humanitarian and regional dimension of the crisis in my discussions with the Minister for Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs of Rwanda and with the country representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. In Addis Ababa I held consultations with high-ranking officials of the African Union, including His Excellency Mr. Smaïl Chergui, Commissioner for Peace and Security of the African Union, representatives of AU member States and partners and the United Nations Special Representative to the African Union. The special focus of my discussions in Addis Ababa was the AU engagement in Burundi and cooperation between the AU and the United Nations.

I have shared the detailed written report of my visit with members of the Security Council through the established channel. Today, I would like to share with it the main takeaway points of my visit and reflect on the PBC's continued engagement with Burundi, including recent contacts with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

After my departure, and prior to the visit of the Secretary-General and the high-level AU visit of five African Heads of States and Government, the Government of Burundi announced a series of decisions, which included the release of prisoners, the reopening of two radio stations and the revocation of the arrest warrants against approximately 15 members of the opposition, to which the Secretary-General referred earlier. The members of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission welcome those steps and encourage their rapid implementation, as well as additional steps to reinforce the momentum created by those measures and the recent high-level political engagement.

The urgent need for a viable, inclusive and intensified dialogue process was underlined by most interlocutors in Bujumbura, Kigali and Addis Ababa. Diverging views on the specifics of an inclusive dialogue persist, however. In Bujumbura, I had an opportunity to meet with the National Commission for the Inter-Burundian Dialogue. The Commission depicted the dialogue as a series of large gatherings in which participants elaborate their views on how to create democratic conditions for the Burundian elections in 2020. Preliminary findings by the National Commission seem to indicate that a key request of the population is to amend the Constitution and to revise the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement for Burdundi, including with regard to ethnic quotas, term limits for the President and dual citizenship. Some national and many international observers I met with expressed concerns that tensions in Burundi could rise if the current process evolved into a campaign to revise the Arusha Agreement.

My discussions in Bujumbura also showed that there was a considerable risk that the economic downturn could become an additional driver of the crisis. After 10 years of steady economic growth, the country experienced negative growth of 4 per cent in 2015. The Government of Burundi expressed its regret about the fact that some partners had reduced their cooperation with Burundi. The suspension of direct budgetary support will have an immediate impact on public expenditures, which will decrease by 22 per cent in 2016. I was told by development partners that the political crisis had slowed the implementation of strategic programmes, such as those on infrastructure, roads and electricity. Furthermore, I was informed that the cycle of cooperation strategies and key assistance mechanisms used by the main financial and development partners of Burundi would end in 2016. Negotiations on a new cycle might take place in a context of uncertainty, if the current political crisis continues. Consequently, envelopes allocated to Burundi might be affected, or the disbursement of funds further delayed. On the other hand, international donors appeared to be ready to re-engage if they saw clear sigs towards the resolution of the current crisis and a more conducive environment being established. In parallel to a political dialogue process, the Government of Burundi and international donors might therefore want to intensify

their conversation on the socioeconomic impact of the crisis.

I share the assessment of previous briefers that the ongoing political crisis and insecurity persists, while the patterns of violent acts committed by elements of the security forces and armed opposition seem to change. The use of grenades in public places appears to be a new trend. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and the human rights observers of the African Union, whom I met with in Bujumbura, confirmed that current incidents might be less visible than those that took place after the events of 11 December, but they reported allegations of forced disappearances, killings, torture, ill-treatment, hate speech and sexual violence.

On 9 March, I briefed members of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission on my mission. In a subsequent discussion, the PBC members reiterated their rejection of violence committed by either side. Many members expressed grave concern about the ongoing violence and human rights violations. Members welcomed the work being done by the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General, Mr. Benomar, and the deployment of his team in Burundi. They also expressed support for the Special Adviser, particularly for his efforts aimed at ensuring coherence between the different actors. The members of the configuration further welcomed the recent appointment of the former President of Tanzania, Mr. Benjamin Mkapa, to facilitate the dialogue process under the East African Community mediator, President Museveni of Uganda. EAC members considered the AU decision to deploy an additional 100 human rights monitors and 100 military experts a positive step towards achieving general stabilization and an improvement in the human rights situation. The Peacebuilding Fund is planning to support the 32 AU human rights observers, who are already in the country and are cooperating closely with OHCHR. Other partners are encouraged to consider contributions to the deployment of additional observers.

With regard to the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), the joint steering committee that oversees PBF activities in Burundi decided, on 9 March, to launch new initiatives in various areas of dialogue, including support for women's roles in the dialogue process, the promotion and protection of human rights, and support for victims, youth engagement, community security and social cohesion.

From my discussions in the region and within the Burundi configuration of the PBC, I have drawn the following conclusions.

First, the resolution of the current crisis in Burundi will require maximum coherence among international and regional organizations, in particular among the United Nations, the AU and the EAC. Coordinated efforts will be crucial for establishing a viable, inclusive and intensified political dialogue. Such a process can only benefit from the accumulated experience of those three organizations, if the three join their efforts. In that regard, the Security Council's overall guidance and support will be critical.

Secondly, the increased international presence in Burundi can considerably help to improve the security and human rights situation and to reduce violence. It therefore remains crucial that the Security Council continue its discussion in consultation with the Government of Burundi on the options for United Nations engagement. I am glad that the African Union and the Government of Burundi have agreed to increase the number of human rights and military observers. I also welcome the recent visit to Burundi by three independent experts mandated by the Human Rights Council, which will be followed by additional visits between now and July. That sort of impartial monitoring and engagement can also help to clarify allegations and ease tensions within Burundian society.

Thirdly, there is a need to draw attention to the possible regional implications of the crisis.

Fourthly, the socioeconomic dimension of the current crisis must not be overlooked. In line with the holistic approach to peacebuilding, the Burundi configuration can continue to serve as a platform for including the socioeconomic dimensions in the international debate on Burundi. For my part, I will continue the configuration's engagement with the main development partners of Burundi. A systematic dialogue between the Government of Burundi and international donors would help to clarify mutual expectations. In that regard, the next cycle of the Burundi poverty-reduction strategy paper provides a crucial opportunity to redefine the Government's vision and to reset cooperation with international partners.

The President: I thank Mr. Lauber for his briefing.

I now give the floor to the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Mr. Manongi (United Republid of Tanzania): We thank you, Mr. President, for convening this open briefing on the situation in Burundi.

The President of Tanzania, His Excellency Mr. John Pombe Magufuli, is acutely aware that the state of affairs in Burundi is of great concern to the subregion, and indeed to the international community. That is not only because Burundi is a State member of the community, but also because, as a region, we all stand to suffer adverse consequences resulting from the insecurity and instability in Burundi. We therefore commend the Secretary-General's efforts to promote cooperation with Burundi and the region. We also ask that those welcome efforts be balanced by equal measures to enhance support for the socioeconomic needs of the people of Burundi, as well as to assist the country in its efforts to strengthen its institutions of governance. Obviously, there are a number of push factors driving the current state of play that need to be approached and resolved in an open, inclusive and comprehensive manner. We thank those who have supported our efforts. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that more support is required in order to sustain a credible and inclusive dialogue in Burundi.

The East African Community will continue to exert all efforts in support of peace and security in Burundi. The region is conscious that, if left unchecked, the political situation there has the potential to degenerate further, with far-reaching humanitarian implications. The East African Community is ready to play its part. We welcome the engagement of the United Nations and look forward to its playing a complementary and mutually supportive role. We are encouraged by, and indeed grateful for, the confidence that has been expressed in connection with the appointment of Mr. Benjamin William Mkapa, former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, as a facilitator in support of the mediator for the Burundi peace process, Mr. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, President of the Republic of Uganda. In his efforts to assist Burundi and its people during the Arusha peace process in 2000, President Mkapa had this to say:

> "A sustainable solution to the Burundi conflict has to come out of negotiations in which all who have a stake in Burundi can freely participate. A sustainable solution has to be owned and respected by all participants in the peace process. The outside world cannot impose a durable solution."

We believe that that admonition remains true for the circumstances that we are dealing with today in Burundi. It is therefore encouraging that President Mkapa is currently making a preliminary visit to the region in order to ensure that there is a shared understanding of his new mandate. He has assured community leaders of his mission's dedication, openness and inclusiveness. He needs, and deserves, the genuine support and cooperation of all parties in Burundi, the region and the international community. We expect all stakeholders to be forthcoming and to commit to a speedy, genuine and successful outcome. The subregion will not hesitate to seek and call for the imposition of stern measures on any individuals or groups that attempt to act as spoilers of the undertaking. In the meantime, we call for unity of purpose and action as we promote the process for a journey of great hope and expectations embodied in the legitimate aspirations of the people of Burundi, the East African Community, the African Union and, indeed, the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the Minister for External Relations and International Cooperation of Burundi.

Mr. Nyamitwe (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, my delegation would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, and the delegation of Angola on your leadership of the Security Council for the month of March, and to thank you for organizing today's briefing on the situation in Burundi. I am grateful to the Secretary-General for his presence today and would like to thank him, personally and on behalf of President Nkurunziza and the people of Burundi, for his recent visit to our country. I must also not fail to thank the Security Council for its visit to Burundi in January. I am also grateful to the other speakers for the quality of their contributions to today's meeting, even while I am sure they will understand if I cannot fully agree with the statement by Mr. Al Hussein. One sometimes wonders whether he understands the situation in our country, since his statement has so many gaps, so many troubling facts and, frankly speaking, so many contradictions. In my statement, I would like to emphasize some essential aspects of the political, security and human rights situations in Burundi.

With regard to the political dialogue, we are aware that the current political problems facing Burundians can be solved only through an inclusive, open and sincere dialogue among Burundians themselves, both inside and outside the country, conducted correctly

and holistically. The Head of State has already committed to undertaking that dialogue, and he already communicated his willingness in that regard to the Secretary-General during his visit on 3 February, and to the high-level delegation of the African Union, led by President Jacob Zuma of South Africa, which visited Bujumbura in the wake of the unfortunate hearing of 25 February.

We are in complete agreement that it is clear that a political solution must be preferred to a military one. It is true that there are still parties in Burundi who believe in a military solution, but we believe that they are mistaken. One of the recommendations made at the meeting of the Ministers of Defence of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region held on 10 February in Luanda called on all stakeholders to engage in the inter-Burundian dialogue, which is the best way to build peace and unity for the Burundian people. Yes, the dialogue we want should be inclusive, but we should nonetheless be able to express our oft-repeated position that those who joined in the attempt to overthrow our legitimate institutions on 13 May 2015 can obviously not be granted an opportunity to achieve through dialogue what they failed to achieve through a coup d'état.

It is therefore understandable that the dialogue cannot be used as a way to disguise or reinforce a culture of impunity in Burundi or to trample on universally recognized principles of democracy. Rather, dialogue should be a way to consolidate peace and social justice. We have therefore committed in good faith to such a political dialogue, whose internal momentum is well under way under the leadership of the National Commission on the Inter-Burundian Dialogue, which is working hard throughout the country to ensure that no one is left out. In any case, all Burundian citizens are invited to contribute to our national reconstruction.

With regard to national reconciliation, the President of the Republic announced a week ago the official start of the operational phase of the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the presence of several of our international, technical and financial partners. As the Council is aware, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which is chaired by a cleric, consists of 11 members, of whom six are Hutu, four Tutsi and one Twa, which corresponds to the quotas recognized by the Arusha accord and confirmed by the 2005 Constitution. The Commission therefore symbolizes political, ethnic, regional and gender inclusiveness. It is tasked with preparing a programme for pardons, reconciliation and reparation to be submitted to the Government and Parliament of Burundi. Burundi must take advantage of such an opportunity to work calmly to build their country's future in order to ensure that the events of the past can never be repeated. We are talking about a huge work in progress — as the Arusha accord foresaw — to which Burundi's Head of State attaches enormous importance, and we will of course be very happy if the international community would lend us its assistance.

On the regional front, consultations are ongoing with subregional facilitation in order to arrive at agreement on important points for the next dialogue session with those members of the diaspora who desire peace, with full inclusivity, as was outlined in resolution 2248 (2015), adopted by the Security Council on 12 November of last year. Among other things, those points concern the effective identification of participants as well as the items on the agenda, in accordance with the proposed methodology, with which Burundi is in full agreement. We are grateful to the former President of the United Republic of Tanzania, Mr. Benjamin Mkapa, the new facilitator of the inter-Burundian dialogue, who is, as the representative of Tanzania just mentioned, fully involved in consultations in the region. The day before yesterday he was received by President Museveni of Uganda, yesterday he was received in President Kagame of Rwanda and today he was received by President Pierre Nkurunziza of Burundi. As I speak, I think he is on his return journey.

With regard to security, I can confirm that overall it is good. It is true that there are still some challenges here and there, but overall the situation is good at the national level and citizens see peaceful activities. However, there are still some elements of the opposition who are throwing grenades at peaceful citizens; I think others have referred to that. Contrary to the information provided by the opposition to the foreign press and associated or supportive media, Burundi is not guilty of those crimes. If you come to Burundi you will see that the image that is being put out by the media is not true at all. The good news is that the few cases of criminality and local terrorism aimed at drawing the attention of the international community are being brought under control.

Several young people who were manipulated and recruited into criminal groups gave themselves up to the security services with weapons, ammunition and other

military paraphernalia, and this movement to renounce violence continues. The criminal elements who turned themselves in were turned over to the National Human Rights Commission for their reintegration into their communities of origin. They are cooperating and have indicated certain locations where these opposition groups have killed and buried citizens in common graves. Today another common grave was found in a zone that was under the control of the opposition for a long time.

For us and for the Council it is clear that throwing grenades into crowds is terrorism, which must be treated and condemned as such. No ideology, no political fight can justify such senseless acts that take the lives of children and women, who have nothing to do with the political situation in the country. We ask the Security Council to condemn the opposition's violence and terrorism, which contravenes the provisions of resolution 2248 (2015).

In order to restore sustainable peace to our country, we have placed the civilian population at the heart of the Government's concerns. The process is under way and the results have been satisfactory. Because of the cooperation among the population, the police, the justice sector and the administration, many weapons have been seized from citizens.

In order to continue with the disarmament process in transparency and cooperation, as the Chair of the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission said earlier, there is a need for an international presence. That is the reality with the presence of African Union human rights and military observers, whose numbers have now been increased to 100 in each of the two categories. Although we will soon sign the memorandum of understanding, that has already been agreed; of course, we now have to wait for the personnel to be identified and sent to the country.

My country Burundi cannot remain silent. We will never be able to remain silent while we are subject to aggression. This clearly represents an existential threat. This has to do with acts of aggression coming from Rwanda, a neighbouring country with which Burundi has much in common in terms of culture. Our languages are not that dissimilar. Several credible reports have already confirmed that Rwanda is facilitating the recuitment, the training and the arming of Burundian refugees in order to destabilize Burundi. I cannot give the Council the full list, but if one wants to know more you can read the report of the United Nations Group of Experts on the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the reports of Refugees International and Human Rights Watch. There is irrefutable proof available to us going back to the beginning of the insurrection in 2015, as well as the testimonials of children who were recuited and trained by Rwanda into the movement. They refer to specific military sites.

We have also provided similar information to institutions. The Head of State in Burundi took the opportunity to mention that clearly to the Secretary-General when he visited Burundi. It is something we take very seriously. We cannot remain silent in that regard. Let no one be under any illusions about that. As long as the situation persists, we must talk about it so that these activities stop. It is difficult today to know who is behind these acts — with so much information, proof and details available to Burundi as well as to the international community. On several occasions, Burundi has asked for an expanded joint verification mission from the Conference on the Great Lakes Region be sent to Burundi to clarify matters and determine whether those allegations are well-founded or not. That has not been the case; nevertheless, that has not discouraged us in the least.

Through our Permanent Mission in New York, Burundi has officially asked the President of the Security Council to address the issue urgently, as it seriously threatens international peace and security — not just in Burundi and Rwanda, but also the whole region. The time to act is now, as tomorrow will be too late. Today our Government once again launches an appeal to the Security Council to remind Rwanda that it has international obligations in terms of refugees as well as in terms of good neighbourliness. There are resolutions and instruments to which it freely adhered that call for respect for the peaceful coexistance of States in accordance with international law. Its recruitment activities must stop; the training and arming of negative forces that are attacking Burundi must also stop. We hope that that Council will accede to our request.

With regard to human rights, my delegation recalls that Burundi attaches great importance to human rights. We have adopted a zero-tolerance policy in this area. We acknowledger that there are still cases of human rights violations, as there are elsewhere. We have established a judicial investigation commission to shed light into certain allegations of human rights violations from the beginning of the insurrection up

until today. The human rights path in Burundi is not a rocky one; there are challenges, yes, but we have faith that we can overcome them. The willingness is there. It is palpable. The support of partners is needed to move forward together on the path towards democracy.

We also recall that our Government has placed the fight against impunity at the heart of its priorities. That is done without concern for political affiliations. We cooperate closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. He knows that well, as does his office in Burundi. We have given them free access to our services regarding transparency issues. The same goes for the human rights observers of the African Union, the number of which, as I just mentioned, has just been increased. Of course, we regret the fact that certain reports do not necessarily reflect the situation on the ground. We can say that this is more or less to be expected, within certain limitations.

We have been just as cooperative with the human rights experts of the United Nations who have just spent time in our country. At the end of their mission a few days ago, the experts held a press conference during which they declared:

> "We have observed a relative calm in Burundi. We should point out that we have not noted a disturbance. We have noticed a glimmer of hope, a clear and shared will to engage and to move forward to improve peace and security in Burundi. Within the framework of our mission, we cannot say that the situation in Burundi is an explosive one — absolutely not."

With regard to the freedom of expression and of civil society, I wish to inform all present that Burundi has a good tradition of freedom of expression and very active civil society that we wish to maintain. In that regard, we have just authorized the re-opening of two private radio stations that had been destroyed in the wake of the attempted coup of 13 May 2015. I am speaking of Radio Isanganiro and Rema Television and Radio, which have already begun to broadcast. In addition to those two radio stations, which have resumed their activities, the National Communications Directorate has also just authorized a private radio station, Izere FM.

With regard to socioeconomic development, my delegation has the impression that the political concerns of our partners have eclipsed the economic and social needs of our population. Clearly, placing political aspects before socioeconomic concerns is a factor that could lead to increased stability in our country. The two dimensions should receive equal attention from our partners, whom we ask to resume cooperation with our Government, which seeks to do the proper thing. We ask our partners to seriously consider the appeal made the President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, on behalf of the African Union high-level delegation to Burundi, with regard to the importance of resuming cooperation as a factor for strengthening peace.

With regard to cooperation with the European Union, my Government takes note of its recent declaration relating to the suspencion of direct aid of the European Union to Burundi. Contrary to what Mr. Zeid said just now, we do not have the impression that this decision is in accordance with article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement. There are clearly two parties to any agreement. No party cannot take advantage of its greater strength, be it numeric or qualitative, to impose on the other party its vision of the situation or, quite frankly, its political preference. This is indeed a clear violation of the Cotonou Agreement, which the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries will at some point have to review to ensure improved fairness, even if there is no real equality, between the ACP countries and the European Union. As I said, the Agreement is not a one-way street.

The Burundian Government regrets the fact that European Union has not taken into account positive developments in the ongoing inclusive inter-Burundian dialogue or recently adopted human rights measures, including the pardoning of more than 2,000 prisoners and the cancellation of arrest warrants against certain politicians, the liberation of a number of people who had been detained with respect to the insurrection, and the the re-opening of a number of private radio stations. Despite this hasty and unfair decision, my Government will continue wholeheartedly to redress the political and security situations in the interests of the well-being of the Burundian people, while bearing in mind our sovereignty, territorial integrity and good relations with our partners.

Regarding cooperation with the United Nations, Burundi offers — I repeat, offers — its full cooperation with the country team, the team of the Special Adviser of the Secretary-General, as well as the Burundi configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission. Burundi remains available to the Secretary-General to discuss and agree on the size

and mission of the Special Adviser's team provided for under resolution 2248 (2016).

My delegation recalls that African Heads of State, members of the African Union Peace and Security Council (AUPSC), the high-level delegation of the African Union led by South African President Jacob Zuma and the Burundian people, through their Parliament, rejected the option of an armed international presence in Burundi, favouring the option of the inter-Burundian political dialogue and observation missions. We clearly reiterate our unequivocal position. The Head of State reiterated this position to the Secretary-General during their talks of 23 February in Bujumbura.

I would like to conclude my remarks with two or three words. When the Council receives reports on Burundi in New York, it gets the impression that the country is on the precipice, as has often repeated Mr. Zeid. This perception of the country has led some institutions to make decisions that, in our opinion, were unfortunate — such the as AUPSC decision to deploy 5,000 men. This decision was not based on realities on the ground.

We do not at all feel that we have closed the door to initiatives that would be willing to take the reality on the ground into account. Whenever the Peacebuilding Commission has sought to visit and see Burundi, it has been able to do so without problem. The Security Council has come and it has seen that Burundi was not on the brink of genocide. I very sincerely and solemnly urge those who would understand the reality on the ground to come themselves to see it rather than rely on reports that are sometimes not necessarily a reflection of reality on the ground and seek or serve other interests that are certainly contrary to the interests of the Burundian people and the region in general.

My country, Burundi, my people, the people of Burundi — Hutus, Tutsis and Twas together — aspire to peace. Burundi absolutely aspires to peace. The Burundian people have suffered in the past and certainly would not wish to find themselves today or in the coming years in the same conditions in which they found themselves in 1965, 1969, 1972, 1993 and beyond. That is why we invite not only members of the Security Council, but also all the countries of the region to work for the country to remain stable, so that the institutions are stable and not disrupted, and to help the Burundian people to realize their aspirations to participate legitimately, like all other peoples of the world, in all that globalization can offer today in material terms, and to cushion the shocks that this same globalization can bring to the peoples of the South.

The President: I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 4.20 p.m.